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MOVE ON!

POSSIBILITIES OF THE DRAMATIC POWER AND EXPRESSION OF THE HANDS AND ARMS

Miss Mary Lawton, Whose Hands Are Considered Ideal, Says We Are Far Behind in the Technic of Their Movements in Dramatic Art

YOU use your hands admirably," said David Belasco to Miss Mary Lawton, who was rehearsing in one of his productions.

"I do because I fully realize their dramatic importance," Miss Lawton replied. This was an expression of the creed which has made the small parts she has played individual and has added distinction to those of wider scope. To quote her exact words:

"The hand is one of the most potent factors in art."

Daniel Chester French, the sculptor, considers Miss Lawton's hands ideal from every point of view—contour, expression and dramatic power—and she has posed for the hands and arms of his ideal women. In his studio on West Eighth street she talked with a reporter for THE SUNDAY SUN about the dramatic importance of the hand. The sculptor occasionally interrupted his modelling to put in a word or to emphasize something she said.

"If we needed to convince ourselves that we are far behind our possibilities in the use of the hand and arm on the stage," she said, "all that is necessary for us to do is to study the perfection of the art in France and Italy. Even the English actors, handicapped by their traditions, are as a general rule superior to us in this respect because they are more thorough in technic."

"I have studied the hands of all the great actresses and those that made the most profound impression upon me were Duse's. Bernhardt uses hers wonderfully, for she is too great in technic to overlook or belittle their aid, but Duse's hands express more than the French actresses', for they have besides rare poetic grace intense subtlety and spiritual suggestion. I had watched her with feelings of mingled admiration, envy and hopelessness in 'Adrienne Lecouvreur,' 'Magda' and several other plays, but until I saw her as the wife in 'Gloconda' I did not wake up to her indescribable art in this direction."

"In 'Gloconda' there is the inevitable triangle. The wife and the interloper—this time the model of the husband—have a furious quarrel in his studio. In the turmoil the finished statue is in imminent danger of falling and the wife, forgetful of her wrongs, saves it; but in the act her hands and arms are

"In the next scene she appears with the amputated members concealed beneath a long clinging robe of black crepe stuff, but you are more conscious of those poor limbs than if they were whole, and in the last act, where the

child rushes toward her and she is unable to take it in her maternal embrace, Duse reaches the very height of expressive art."

"I was speaking of this scene to Mr. French one day. He was silent a moment, then said: 'I doubt if in sculptural art there is anything more expressive than the lost arms of the Venus de Milo and those of the Samothracian "Victory." How we would resent their restoration! And if it were possible that authentic data should be discovered and official sanction given to their modelling, what a public calamity! As it is we dream those arms into place, and to each dreamer is his own interpretation.'"

"Mme. Simone used her hands delightfully. As a general rule while the French use their hands much more frequently to accentuate their speech, or in place of it, than either Anglo-Saxon or Teuton, they are not nearly so graceful or convincing with these gestures as are the Italians. With the latter every movement has a special sig-

facile but never futile, while the French nificance; their gestures are always frequently express with theirs a general mood of excitement, irritation and the like rather than a specific feeling."

"Novelli said once—and possibly he is the greatest character actor in the world at the present moment—that his study was the street, the hospital and the shop or other place where people gathered together. It was there he watched the faces and hands drawn with pain, the furtive movement of

the mendicant, the nonchalant gesture of the apple eating boy, the careless farewell on the street corner, superficially light but hiding a heartache. Even the hands holding subway straps are food to the imagination."

"After hearing Mark Twain lecture Sir Henry Irving said that Mr. Clemens would have made a better actor than writer. Mark Twain had beautiful hands, and often I have seen him stop and complete his sentence with a gesture so convincing that words would

Daniel Chester French, the Sculptor, Has Used Miss Lawton's Hands and Arms in Many of His Figures—Duse's Remarkable Power

"Pantomimists and dancers all study the use and meaning of the hand and arm; it is only the actor who seems to ignore their importance. Yet in a small part where a player has but the one moment to hold his audience, think how with the clever, convincing gesture he can walk off with the honors we all so zealously crave. Many actresses know how to dress; they are perfect in facial expression, but how many of their hands do you recall when you leave a theatre? How frequently you hear the expression 'Her face was perfectly wonderful in that third act'; how infrequently you hear 'Did you notice with what a superb gesture she expressed her disdain?'"

"Mr. French has also a great admiration for the late Adelaide Neilson. Of her he has said to me many times, 'I felt her hands the moment she came on the stage.'"

"Another shining exception is Mary Garden, whom I personally consider the greatest actress in this country. The technic of her hand movement is marvellous; there is just as much difference in the use of these members when she is *Melba*, *Saltome*, *Le Jongleur*, *Thais* as there is in the music she sings. The hands of *Thais* are particularly worth studying. The contrast between the make-up and gestures of the courtesan and the nun touches the opposite notes of the scale in this direction."

"Another celebrity whose hands may be studied with profit is Miss Ruth St. Denis. She has a wonderful cobra dance in which the muscles underneath the skin ripple with the sinuous, undulating movement of the reptile, and her hand, with its replica of the serpent's head and seems always about to strike. Then watch those same hands when she holds a lotus flower, when she burns incense, when as a Yogi, nearly reaching Nirvana, she expresses the height of spirituality. Well, words just fail to express my admiration."

"Pavlova's hands are like the petals of a flower when she dances and you expect to see them float away. The way Genée holds the edge of her skirts is a revelation, too, in the art of the hand and wrist."

Mr. French, being asked to explain just what he meant by a beautiful hand, said:

"The beautiful hand does not necessarily mean a hand that is absolutely correct according to standard measurements any more than the beautiful face must mean the face that is classic. Browning in the poem 'Andrea del Sarto' has the painter say to his wife, 'Your hand—it is a woman in itself.' That hand must have been beautiful

because it was expressive. And you feel its femininity."

"The expressive hand may be beautiful, however. Miss Lawton's is. Frequently I have been puzzled to know how to place her hand and arm and she has, without thought, taken the exact pose. This was particularly noticeable in the statue of *Memory*."

"When I was new in the profession I followed Mr. French's advice," interpolated Miss Lawton, "and in the galleries here and in Europe carefully studied the poses of the hands. When I saw the famous Holbein at the National Gallery, London, I thought what an interesting document a cast of hands, beginning with the medieval times, would make for the woman suffrage party."

"The medieval hands, and the Dutch Princess of Holbein furnishes a fair example, were usually fat, dimpled and soulless. You felt that the woman gained her end by intrigue, that she was completely dominated, soul, mind and body, and had neither intellectual nor spiritual force. Compare that lineless, futile hand with the hand of today; what centuries of mental and spiritual evolution are demonstrated in that difference!"

"I think that most of us remember the hands of Mona Lisa, as well as we do her face. If the Sphinx had been furnished with these members I imagine they would resemble those of the Italian signorina, whom Leonardo painted to slow, sensuous music."

"Once in Paris I visited Rodin's studio in the Sacre Coeur. He had recently completed a cast of two hands, those of a man and a woman. The man's hand enfolded the woman's, which was closed like the petals of a rose within it. He said it was his habit to ask visitors to name his newly completed work, and several titles were suggested by our party. 'Protection' was the favorite. I often wonder what he did call it. He had so marvellously contrasted the two, not only in regard to shape, size and contour but also expression, one so masculine, the other so divinely feminine."

Mr. French has a very interesting collection of hands. At the close of the interview Miss Lawton selected one and held it up to view. In her own expressive hand it formed a wonderful contrast, which Mr. French smilingly pointed out.

It was the hand of a child—woman, grown up in body but not in mind. It was the sort of hand that would be pretty on a five-year-old, but not on a woman of twenty-five. It was plump and dimpled. The nails were carefully shaped and manicured. The fingers were nearly all the same length, and there was not a line in it.



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Miss Mary Lawton.

have detracted from rather than added to his meaning.

"I also asked Mr. French to name some actor whose hands had impressed him as perfect in their expressive force. He mentioned those of George Arliss immediately."

Heroic figure by Daniel Chester French, for hands and arms of which Miss Lawton posed.